

WHEN ALL OPPRESSION SHALL CEASE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, a profound 3-hour debate took place in the House of Commons on the persecution of Christians globally. Multiple British parliamentarians argued with great passion and persuasion that this is the human rights issue of our day and one which demands great attention on the part of the British Government, and the West more broadly.

In some respect, it is a sad commentary that such a conversation was remarkable, and yet it was. When was the last time this body, this Congress, let alone this administration or the State Department, spent even a fraction of that time talking about the thousands of people of faith who daily face discrimination, persecution, violence, and even death simply because of their most deeply held beliefs?

It is worth noting that several weeks earlier the House of Commons had a debate on the persecution of Christians, specifically in the Middle East. There was an overwhelming number of speakers, too many more than the allotted time. This week's debate starts to satisfy that interest.

In comparison, we have before us relatively modest legislation that has languished in the Senate for two consecutive Congresses now which would create a special envoy within the U.S. Department of State charged with advocating for vulnerable religious minorities in the Middle East and east Central Asia. How do we explain the utter lack of urgency on the part of our own government to address an epic exodus, that of Christianity from its very birthplace?

The House of Commons debate is timely, not simply because of the magnitude and pervasiveness of the problem, but also because millions of professing Christians around the world have just embarked on the Advent season in anticipation of celebrating the birth of Jesus, a birth marked by its humble beginnings in a small Middle Eastern town called Bethlehem.

Yet, as British member of Parliament, Sir Tony Baldry, noted with a sad irony:

There is now practically no country—from Morocco to Pakistan—in which Christians can freely practice their religion.

He continued:

There is a severe danger, as we start to celebrate the feast of Christmas in this country, that all Christianity will be almost completely erased from the traditional Middle East Holy Land of the Bible. Joseph would not now be advised to take Mary to Egypt to avoid the dangers of Herod, because Jesus would just not be safe there today.

To follow on Sir Baldry's line of thinking, the patriarch Abraham would

also have a difficult time surviving in Iraq having come from Ur, which is now Nasiriyah. Jonah would be hard pressed to make it to Nineveh, and Paul could scarcely travel the road to Damascus in Syria.

The debate in the House of Commons began with a staggering statistic, namely, that one Christian is killed every 11 minutes somewhere on Earth for their faith.

While the focus of the House of Commons' debate was on persecuted Christians, several MPs noted that whether or not you are a person of faith, all should be concerned by this troubling trend. Ultimately, freedom of religion and belief is a bellwether for other cherished freedoms. Where this "first freedom" is compromised, the whole of human rights is under assault.

□ 1400

In country after country, freedom of religion is indeed compromised, and Christians, to borrow a phrase from history, are in the eye of the "gathering storm."

This is perhaps no more true than in the Middle East. Here we see governmental, societal, and communal violence and repression against religious communities which specifically targets religious minorities, including Christians.

These realities have been exasperated by the so-called Arab Spring, a spring which has devolved into winter for many of the most vulnerable in these societies, foremost among them, ancient Christian communities.

With the fall of Hosni Mubarak, Coptic Christians, numbering roughly 8 to 10 million, are leaving in droves in the face of increased repression, persecution, and violence. They were increasingly marginalized with the ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Of course, recent events in Egypt indicate a rejection, in part, of the Brotherhood's approach, but the situation is fluid, and news reports indicate that Islamists are taking advantage of the unrest to target Coptic Christians.

Similarly, Iraq's Christian population has plummeted. Churches have now been targeted, believers kidnapped for ransom, and families threatened with violence if they stay.

During the debate in the House of Commons, Canon Andrew White, famously dubbed the "Vicar of Baghdad" as he oversees the only Anglican Church in Iraq, was quoted as saying that Christians "are frightened even to walk to church because they might come under attack. All the churches are targets."

He went on to say, "We used to have 1.5 million Christians. Now we have probably only 200,000 left. There are more Iraqi Christians," he said, "in Chicago than there are here."

That is amazing. And this body, this Congress, this administration, silent.

The issues I have just outlined must be viewed not simply as today's news but, rather, through the lens of his-

tory. A phrase not often heard outside of the majority Muslim world is "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people."

The "Saturday people" are, of course, the Jewish people. Except for Israel, the once vibrant communities and countries throughout the region are now decimated. In 1948, the Jewish population of Iraq was roughly 150,000. Today, no more than four individuals remain. In Egypt, the Jewish population was once as many as 80,000. Now roughly 20 remain. It appears a similar fate may await the ancient Christian community in these same lands.

If the Middle East is effectively emptied of the Christian faith, this will have great geopolitical and, I would argue, spiritual implications. But rather than being met with urgency, vision, or creativity, our government's response has been anemic and, at times, outright baffling, especially to the communities most impacted by the changing Middle East landscape.

Multiple other countries were mentioned during the House of Commons debate, including, but not limited to, China, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

And keep in mind, the Obama administration has not pushed Iran for the release of Pastor Saeed Abedini. He sits in prison, his life is endangered, and this administration is silent.

It was rightly noted, with some degree of irony, that, despite the blood spilt in Afghanistan by British and American forces alike, not a single church—not a single church—remains in that nation.

One member of Parliament, Rehman Chishti, focused on the nation of Pakistan, where he was born. He said:

I come from a Muslim background. My father was an imam. When I saw the topic was persecution of Christians in the 21st century, I knew that it was absolutely right and proper to have a debate on that subject. It is important for the world to realize that persecution goes on.

He continued, and I quote:

The Blasphemy law is at the root of much suffering and persecution of Christians in Pakistan.

And then he specifically mentioned the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of six, who, for years, has languished in prison and faces the death penalty for her alleged crimes.

Do you ever hear her name mentioned on the floor of the House? Do you ever hear her name mentioned at the State Department briefings? Do you ever hear her name mentioned at the White House? Does anyone even know who she is? Does anyone even care?

She faces death, the death penalty, for her alleged crimes.

Too often, when confronted with these types of cases, the State Department offers unsatisfactory assurances that they "raised the issue" during private bilateral discussions, that is, if they raised it at all. Or perhaps the Department issues a bland statement

“condemning the violence,” and then acts as if this is somehow a courageous or principled response to a bloody assault on innocent human life.

This State Department and this President ought to learn from President Reagan and his State Department. President Reagan always advocated for those who were persecuted. And Secretary Baker and the Bush administration always advocated.

This administration is silent. And, quite frankly, this Congress, House, and Senate are silent.

The suffering church takes little solace in this approach, nor should we. In fact, I profoundly reject this approach. The Congress should profoundly reject this approach. And I humbly submit, the church in the West should demand more, for, if not them, who?

With a few notable exceptions, among them the Catholic Church, specifically, Cardinal Dolan, who, in his farewell address as head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, beckoned the bishops to extend their efforts to the “dramatic front lines of this battle, where Christians are paying for their fidelity with their lives.”

Too few in the American church are burdened with this point of action for their suffering brethren.

Reverend Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” is addressed to his fellow—and everyone ought to read Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” It was addressed to his fellow clergymen. Earlier in the letter, he speaks of his love for the church, a love that I share, but then he goes on to admonish his fellow clergymen. This is what Martin Luther King said:

I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, a few years ago, I felt I would be supported by the White church. I felt that the White ministers, priests, rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents. All too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.

Could we not substitute a few words and be left with a similar critique today? Might the imprisoned Pakistani Christian lament, “I thought I would be supported by the church in the West”? Might the fearful Coptic Christians cry, “I thought the ministers in America would be among our strongest allies”?

If the church slumbers, Washington will scarcely lead the way. Do not expect the Congress or the administration to lead the way if the church does not lead the way.

Advent is the season of expectant waiting rich and spiritual meaning for believers the world over. My prayer this Advent is that the suffering church would no longer suffer alone, and that we would stand with them and seek a day when, in the words of the beloved Christian carol, “all oppression shall cease.”

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, as a follow-up to my dear friend, FRANK WOLF from Virginia and the discussions he was having, this needs further emphasis.

Here is an article from the Dallas Morning News dated 10 November 2013, “The Triple Tragedy of Christian Persecution in the Middle East.” It explains that Christians in the broader Middle East, it seems, are in the cross-hairs.

In September, two Taliban suicide bombers rushed All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan, as worshippers exited. One exploded his bomb outside, one inside. Eighty-two people were slaughtered. Eighty-two people trying to peacefully attend a Christian church in Pakistan, where we are sending so much money, were slaughtered, with no consequences coming from the Pakistani Government that we keep engorging with our money.

Back to the article.

In March, it says, two churches and about 100 Christian homes were ransacked in Lahore. Today, millions of Christians and other religious minorities are facing vile persecution. Many Christians are struggling to escape from the countries where their ancestors have lived for two millennia. The human tragedy unfolding in these countries is profoundly disturbing, but the tragedy extends beyond the suffering of individuals and families.

Next month, in Rome, Georgetown University, in partnership with Baylor University, where I went to law school, will showcase the findings of a 2-year study on Christianity and freedom. Three dozen scholars will assemble to discuss what Christians have contributed to freedom and prosperity in their own country and, implicitly, what will be lost if those countries are emptied of their Christian populations.

Might be worthy of parenthetically inserting that, in Afghanistan, where thousands of Americans have shed their blood for Afghan freedom, where billions and billions of dollars have been spent, we help them with a constitution that makes shari’a law the law of the land, that makes the President, basically, almost a dictator.

As some of the regional leaders have told me, DANA ROHRBACHER, STEVE KING, and others, look, if you would just help us with an amendment to the Afghanistan constitution, we would have a shot at staying alive after you pull out.

The Northern Alliance that actually defeated the Taliban completely within

a few months after we started providing them aerial support, embedded special ops, and intelligence, less than 500, they defeated the Taliban, provided some weapons. They defeated the Taliban.

□ 1415

People have forgotten, but for years, in Iraq, people referred to Afghanistan—even Senator Obama. That is where the real fight is. That was where it was done well. And it was done well.

The Taliban was defeated. It was routed by some of the most incredible and fearless fighting, led by General Dostum. We have got people in this administration now calling him and others war criminals because they fought for themselves, their own freedom, to rid themselves of tyrannical radical Islamists. They are Muslims. They are my Muslim friends. They defeated our enemy. They are the enemy of our enemy. And yet this administration is releasing Taliban.

One of the Taliban leaders that has been on national Afghan television was released from Guantanamo by this administration for humanitarian purposes. And the humanitarian purposes are, now he is back leading the Taliban and making it clear that the Taliban will control all of Afghanistan once the United States pulls out. He likes to talk in terms of how the U.S. has been greatly defeated, and that is why we are begging the Taliban, offering to buy them things, give them things if they will just let us exit gracefully.

We are embarrassed around the world. We do no longer have the world’s respect. There are a lot of countries that have never admired us. Tyrannical leaders have not admired the United States because we are the only nation, that I am aware of, in the history of the world that shed our blood and our treasure for other people to have freedom. That is why they still speak Japanese in Japan. That is why they still speak German in Germany. We have never been about building some great empire. We have been about freedom, liberty. No other country has done that. No other country has died for the cause of liberty for people they didn’t know.

And now it seems that this administration keeps committing us to support countries that are persecuting Christians, persecuting secularists, persecuting those who do not have the strict radical Islamist beliefs that the radical Islamic believers have, the leaders, as radical Islamist believers have.

This article in the Dallas News goes on and says:

The countries include Egypt, where the holy family fled when Jesus was a baby. Many Christians now are exiting Egypt in the wake of the badly misnamed “Arab Spring.” In August alone, scores of churches were torched, some of them dating to the fifth century.

They include Syria, Paul’s destination when he was called by Jesus. Today, many Syrian Christians have fled, fearing the prospects of an Islamist regime. One village,